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ABSTRACT

This special journal issue contains nine articles on the subject of using popular literature in the classroom. Subjects covered in the articles include (1) using vernacular supernatural literature to teach the skills of literary analysis, (2) teaching Agatha Christie's "Curtain," (3) pairing the classics with detective fiction, (4) using fantasy literature with students afraid of great literature, (5) the classroom potential of science fiction, (6) the novels of S.E. Hinton, (7) using adolescent fiction to teach values clarification, (8) using traditional fables in the classroom, and (9) encouraging student involvement through popular books. A concluding article discusses ways to cope with censorship. (JL)

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ILLINOIS ENGLISH BULLETIN

ILLINOIS ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

Popular Literature: Its Compatibility with the Basics

Winter 1983

ARTICLES ON:

Best Sellers
Mysteries
Fantasy
Science Fiction
Teenage Novels
Children's Books

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POPULAR LITERATURE: ITS COMPATIBILITY WITH THE BASICS

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ILLINOIS ENGLISH BULLETIN

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The *National Enquirer*, Peter Straub, and Henry James All in the Same Classroom

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Popular literature, as I define it, is literature marketed to large numbers of readers, the members of mass society, and intellectually accessible to the mainstream literate population. We find its titles on best-seller lists, non-specialized book club advertisements, airport newsstands, and supermarket paperback racks. We usually buy and borrow such fiction because of clever marketing and seductive packaging and we read it quickly and uncritically, our attention captured by its vigorous narrative and characterization. Sometimes it surprises literary observers and eventually emerges as "classic" literature in the English classrooms of later generations. Other popular novels and short stories are crystallized in film and their lives extended. Most vernacular literature, however, is forgotten, quickly replaced by variations on old themes and relegated to boxes of paperbacks sold at garage sales, unpretentious used book stores, and public library shelves.

The active life of popular literature is short, but intense. Although its literary quality is often something less than academic literary critics require, it attracts a committed readership and functions as compelling fiction. Why not, therefore, address it in the classroom? Most of our students will not become literary scholars and English teachers, but they will continue to read. Vernacular literature will comprise a good part of their literary experience as adults.

Popular treatments of the supernatural in the narrative arts interest many students and are rarely condemned by them as boring.

Because such literature, both verbal and visual, elicits strong responses that indicate a well developed set of critical criteria used in evaluation, it can be profitably explored in the conventional literature classroom. A full-length bestseller or a few popular short stories about the paranormal provide a means to examine important literary questions concerning tradition, convention, genre, style, structure, and intent.

Probably the easiest topic to discuss in a unit on popular supernatural fiction is the content convention. Horror films about the paranormal, ghost story collections,[1] and recent best-sellers like Peter Straub's *Ghost Story* comprise lively catalogues of content elements traditionally associated with descriptions of supernatural phenomena. A class discussion that draws on student experience with these narrative forms quickly accumulates a detailed list of content conventions used in the genre: mysterious landscapes, the spooky house, night-time settings, inclement weather, domestic animals sensitive to the supernatural, ineradicable blood stains, claustrophobic locations like locked rooms and closets, neurotic occultists, and so on. These elements are so predictable that when some of them are violated, for example in the film *Poltergeist*,[2] in which the supernatural erupts in a contemporary, middle-class California housing development, the deviation from tradition is alarming. Some students find violations of traditional supernatural conventions a satisfying surprise, but as many, or more, are conservative in their appreciation of these long-lived motifs and regard them as necessary elements in the supernatural thriller.

A discussion of content convention can lead into more general literary concerns: How important is the role of tradition orientation in the reader's personal criteria used in evaluating the writer's competence in the genre? How many content conventions can be eliminated before the work becomes non-generic? And, ultimately, how is the concept of genre defined by literary convention? As the discussion progresses, other fiction that is more closely related to *belles-lettres* can be cited, for example, Poe's "Ligeia" and "The Fall of the House of Usher," Hawthorne's "The White Old Maid" and "Young Goodman Brown," James' *The Turn of the Screw*, and Frost's poem, "The Witch of Coös."

In this exploration of content convention in supernatural literature a generalization soon emerges: that popular literature about the subject matter is much more traditional and treats its conventional motifs less subtly than belletristic versions of related story material. This evaluation can be made without harsh value judgments, however, because vernacular literature as an art form is related to folk literature in its emphasis on predictability and tradi-

tion orientation. Audiences usually don't want to be surprised by violations of convention in folk literature, for example in fairy tales and legends, or in popular art, for instance in horror films and pulp fiction.

The popular Gothic novel that sells so well in supermarkets and newsstands is a case in point and provides a good illustration of the difference between vernacular literature and the cultivated fiction that we normally study in the classroom. Gothic traits like the vulnerable heroine, the menacing male figure, the exotic location, the mysterious mansion, and quasi-supernatural occurrences are important to devotees of the genre and their predictability is valued. A survey of Gothic romance cover illustrations coupled with an overview of their content effectively demonstrates the reliance of this popular genre on traditional content elements that are immediately accessible and obvious to its audience.

It is interesting that Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* contains many of the same elements, but handles them with such subtlety and sophistication that their presence is not conspicuous. What is the difference between a Gothic romance like *Nightmare at Riverview*[3] and *Turn of the Screw*? Although the latter was published in serial form in a periodical that did not require graduate studies in literary criticism to appreciate its artistry, it nevertheless operates as literature in a radically different way than a Gothic romance like *To the Dark Tower*.[4] Henry James transforms a related plot into something more than direct narrative aimed at feeding the reader's appetite for the conventional. His exploration of psychological conditions, his purposeful ambiguity, and his disinterest in the simplification of story contrast with Gothic wrters in the vernacular tradition. Their purpose is to provide a dedicated readership with formulaic narrative that elicits a reflexive rather than a reflective response.[5]

As teachers of literature, we probably value James as an artist much more highly than the Gothic romancers writing for the popular audience. However, we should recall with B. F. Skinner, that "Leisure should be relaxing. You must risk the contempt of your younger acquaintances and freely admit that you read detective stories or watch Archie Bunker."[6] We read different kinds of fiction at different times for different purposes. To understand what we find satisfying in vernacular Gothic fiction and how it goes about gratifying our literary appetite at the moment is a critical effort of some value. Our students, we hope, will continue to read as adults, but it is naive to assume that they will consistently choose Henry James or Nathaniel Hawthorne over Stephen King and Peter Straub.

Literary structure is another topic relevant to the use of popular fiction in the classroom. Because supernatural tales are often emphatic in their treatment of action and formularized characters and events, their underlying narrative patterns are more obvious than in belletristic fiction. A common narrative structure found in a wide variety of supernatural literature emerges with little effort when students are asked to outline the major sequences of action in a few stories: 1) dislocation through travel; 2) encounter with a stranger and/or a strange domicile; 3) indications of the unnatural; [4) rationalization of these indications may or may not be present;] 5) intensification of unnatural occurrences; 6) confrontation with the supernatural; 7) escape alive, but with new insight into the "other world," or fatal entrapment, with death or madness as the consequence.

This sequence of inter-related action units is not applicable to all stories concerning the supernatural, but it so often informs the plot that we cannot ignore its importance. We find it in frightening tales shared by children and teenagers in story exchanges, in folktales and legends,[7] in pulp fiction, in bestsellers, and in belletristic fiction like Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown," Sir Walter Scott's "The Tapestried Chamber," and Charles Dickens' "No. 1 Branch Line, the Signalman." Into each structural slot can be inserted a variety of content elements to demonstrate that though the surface action of these stories varies appreciably, fundamentally the narratives are versions of the same plot structure.

Once the concept of structural pattern is clarified, a further step in its analysis can be taken. The similarity between the plot organization of the ghost story and Joseph Campbell's formula for the "hero with a thousand faces" is striking.[8] It would be possible in some classrooms to discuss the meaning of this important structural pattern in supernatural narrative in terms of Campbell's thesis concerning the monomyth and our compulsion to articulate it in so many art forms. One could also consider alternative meanings of the pattern to readers. Is it possible, for example, that the formula is a means by which we can explore at a distance mysteries or anxieties that are difficult for us to confront directly? Does the journey pattern allow us travel into unspeakable places to meet unspeakable specters that remain safely externalized in story form?

I am cautious about supplying simple answers to these complex questions and content myself with several tentative suggestions because I think that a single narrative serves multiple purposes for

different readers and is capable of multiple messages. The dislocation of the protagonist and his or her confrontation with the paranormal may express our own fears about the dissolution of the boundaries separating the natural world from the unnatural world, that is, our materialistic world, rational and explicable, from mystery, the world of the inexplicable and irrational. The victimization of the protagonist often described in supernatural narrative may remind us of our own sense of vulnerability in a universe that sometimes appears to be indifferent, if not hostile to our human concerns. These stories may also permit us to play in public with ideas about death and the individual seldom expressed in everyday conversation. Supernatural narrative, after all, concerns life after death, albeit more often than not as a condition that is regarded as perverse and dangerous by the human characters in the drama. Nagging "what if" questions entertained in private daydreams and nightmares are candidly admitted in the world of the ghost story. Perhaps it is to the benefit of our mental health that they find expression in the shape of formularized narrative art. These discussion topics are possible in some classrooms and unthinkable in others, but when they take place they deal with a crucial question in the study of literature: What does fiction mean to the reader?

Since supernatural subject matter has been especially popular in recent film, bestseller, and the tabloid press, an examination of the narrative forms which treat it and their effect on content and audience response is worth considering. Journalistic, literary, and cinematic versions of the paranormal experience present their shared topic in different ways because of different intents and different constraints imposed by form.

A look at selected sensationalist articles in a publication like the *National Enquirer*, which boasts the "largest circulation of any paper in America," serves as a lively change of pace in a course concerning the narrative arts. An issue current to the writing of the present article included two pieces on the supernatural: "Evil Spirit Terrorizes Family" and "New Study Reveals . . . Over 1 in 4 Believe They Have Talked with the Dead."[9] In the first, the writer recounts a family's experience with a poltergeist in Central America. The story contains most of the conventional elements of the phenomenon, for example, an adolescent in the home, flying objects which touch participants with little impact, and an exorcism. The emphatic use of direct quotations, specific names and places, validating sources (a Father Messmer), and accompanying photographs (one of the family and another of Father Messmer holding the "stones that were thrown by ghost") are noteworthy. Informa-

tion about the event is communicated directly with little attempt at narrative complexity. Sentences and paragraphs are short and to the point. The import of the story is revealed immediately in its first paragraph in bold type: "For three horrifying months, a family was terrorized by a poltergeist that pelted them with stones day and night, doused people with water and even made their dog fly around a room!"

The narrative presents its bizzare subject matter as actual occurrence, validates its putative historicity with several kinds of evidence, and focuses on climactic events with little attention to the development of suspense, so important in the fictive supernatural tale. We are dealing here with "news" rather than an effort to create "art." The journalistic intent of the writer, sensational though it is, affects the presentation of the subject matter, as does the writer's conception of the *National Enquirer* audience and its interests. The importance of these two factors in shaping form and style in the narrative is clear to us, but its emphasis is justified in the classroom.

An interesting parallel to the *National Enquirer* treatment of the paranormal can be found in Daniel Defoe's "The Apparition of Mrs. Veal."[10] Defoe, although an admirable stylist and respectable representative of British *belles-lettres,* draws on some of the same techniques used by the *National Enquirer* reporter. His account describes Mrs. Veal's ghostly visitation to her friend, Mrs. Bargrave and makes use of testimonial and veridical evidence. Defoe's first two sentences give the reader the meat of the story: "This thing is so rare in all its circumstances, and on so good authority, that my reading and conversation has not given me anything like it. Mrs. Bargrave is the person to whom Mrs. Veal appeared after her death. . . ."[11] The narrative has a complex history, but literary historians now conclude that the work is by Defoe and is a journalistic effort to argue the historicity of the strange event. Defoe's style and diction are very different from that of the *National Enquirer* writer and the exclamatory tone less shrill, but his persuasive techniques are similar.

Fiction writers who treat the supernatural deal for the most part with imaginary experience and do not present their stories as descriptions of actual events to be accepted or rejected as historical occurrences. Some kinds of supernatural fiction develop plot, character, and atmosphere by relying almost exclusively on conventional elements. Such narratives, however, involve a carefully developed exposition that creates suspense and mystery and climaxes in a horrifying revelation in the story's conclusion. For

example, in M. R. James' "Lost Hearts,"[12] if the ghoulish purposes of Mr. Abney and his malevolent plans for his little cousin were revealed early in the story instead of in its last paragraphs, we would have little reason to read the tale. Instead, we relish the author's gradual accumulation of menacing details which are not explained until the revelation of Mr. Abney's diabolism at the end of the story.

Other authors in the genre value subtlety and ambiguity. They sustain a sense of mystery throughout the narrative that may not be resolved by the conclusion of the tale. In "The Transfer" by Algernon Blackwood[13] we are never certain what has transpired at tea-time in the British garden. Like the governess in Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw,* Miss Gould both describes and interprets the action for us. She "sees" a barren patch of ground devour unpleasant Uncle Frank. Is she a neurotic fantasist or a gifted (and neurotic) clairvoyant? No answers are provided by Blackwood, who, like Defoe and the *National Enquirer* writer, wants us to ponder the ambiguity and appreciate its mystery. Blackwood is not describing putative historical occurrence. He is not writing to validate the event as factual encounter or to satisfy our appetite for the bizarre. Instead he is creating a fictive world in order to amuse and perplex, using literary techniques that differ from those of the journalist. This point is no revelation to the literature teacher, but it deserves our students' attention. Sometimes we fail to illustrate and clarify important generalizations about literary processes in the classroom because they are so obvious to us as teachers.

The relation between form and content can also be explored in discussions of visual and verbal versions of a common story. Supernatural bestsellers are often adapted for film these days. Stephen King's *Carrie, 'Salem's Lot,* and *The Shining* and Peter Straub's *Ghost Story*[14] have all found their way to the screen in recent years. They constitute excellent examples of vernacular literature and film. Because our students probably "watch" more stories than they read, an examination of differences between visual and verbal forms of the same subject matter is important in their study of the narrative arts. What can *Ghost Story* as film do that *Ghost Story* as novel cannot, and vice versa? How do the two media exploit their shared content in different ways?

Both narratives focus on a small group of aging male friends who were responsible for a woman's death in their younger days. Eventually they come to be terrorized by malevolent specters out to destroy each of them and to eliminate anyone who interferes, consciously or unconsciously, with the creatures' ghastly purposes.

The novel runs w[illegible] over five hundred pages in paperback and the film 109 minutes, so the plot and characterizations were radically simplified in the movie version. Because film narrative is primarily visual rather than verbal, the movie eliminates many of the literary references and elaborations found in the novel. Straub's interesting updating of *The Turn of the Screw* plot as a supernatural experience shared by one of the friends in their story-telling sessions is dropped.[15] The major characters' last names, for example, James and Hawthorne, do not resonate as significantly on the screen as they do on the printed page. The snowfall that begins early in the novel and eventually separates the village from the outside world and isolates its inhabitants from one another is artfully developed by Straub, but not effectively transferred to the screen. The supernatural phenomenon in the film, the specter of the vengeful dead, deviates from the novel's conception of enduring, malevolent shapeshifters. Also missing in the movie version of *Ghost Story* are the psychological explorations of guilt and projection, which are complex and provocative in the novel.

Words, strung together in sentences and paragraphs, force our imaginations to work, to draw on our own experiences and fantasies in order to visualize the action described, and to interpret ambiguous turns of phrase. We read at our own speed and can review an earlier portion of the text if necessary to note the escaped detail or to re-evaluate an interpretation. Because we spend so much time with a lengthy work and participate actively in it through the writer's interplay with our own imaginations, the supernatural narrative in print involves interpretive processes that are different from those used in viewing supernatural narrative on the movie screen. *Ghost Story*, the motion picture, does not explore queries raisd by the novel. Writes Peter Straub:

> ... I wanted to play around with reality in *Ghost Story*, to make the characters confused about what was actually real. So: I built in situations in which they feel they are 1.) acting out roles in a book; 2.) watching a film; 3.) hallucinating; 4.) dreaming; 5.) transported into a private fantasy. This kind of thing, I think, is what our kind of *book* [italics mine] can do very well, what it is naturally suited to do.[16]

Literature in print, even in the vernacular form of the bestseller and the potboiler, can deal with subjective, psychological conditions more easily than film because the print medium allows much greater mobility in the description of mental and spiritual behavior.

In contrast, the popular film medium, which emphasizes the depiction of external action, constrains the presentation of internal states to the viewer. Furthermore, we have little control over the

movie images we view in the darkened theater. We are controlled by the precise, detailed pictures on the screen. They move before our eyes at a rapid tempo that allows us little time for backtracking to an earlier event or characterization that we would like to re-examine. Concrete, unambiguous illustrations of characters in action are created for us through the medium of film. Although we may augment and elaborate them using our own experiences and fantasies, our imaginative investment in them is less necessary than when we read or listen to a narrative. The movie *Ghost Story*, therefore, should not be deprecated as yet another instance of mediocre film adaptation. It tells its story efficiently, sometimes effectively. It creates a specific, frightening world that its audience has paid money to visit. It provides two hours of experience that is reminiscent of a compelling dream about the macabre, albeit one created by an imagination other than our own. And it deals with questions about the supernatural and our fear of it that are compelling to many viewers who persistently seek out such films. In short, the film version of *Ghost Story* makes use of Peter Straub's novel in ways that are appropriate and possible in contemporary popular cinematic art.

In the next few decades, with the increased accessibility of videotape and videodisc machines and the development of public and private film libraries, students will be able to study movies as they now study books. In addition, learning to understand the rhetoric of film — the use of figurative visual images, metaphoric editing, and expressive composition and movement — will be part of a general liberal arts education. At that point, then, a popular movie can deal more often with themes and ideas that now seem more at home on the printed page, even that of a commercial bestseller. It is important for students to entertain such possibilities. An examination of the two media as they deal with a shared subject matter provides an opportunity to do so. In the process we can enrich the possible rewards of careful reading and careful viewing, even if the visual and verbal texts used are popular ones.

Vernacular supernatural literature in the classroom is not merely an entertaining rest-stop between belletristic oases. Popular fiction and film about the paranormal can raise questions about the ways in which form and intention shape content, about narrative structure and its significance, and about the nature of genre and its dependence on literary convention and tradition. All are respectable questions relevant to the teaching of literature. That they are initiated by a newsstand paperback, a tabloid purchased at the supermarket checkout counter, or a grisly movie does not depreciate their value.

NOTES

[1] See Appendix 2, "The Books," in Stephen King, *Stephen King's Danse Macabre* (NY: Everest House, 1981), pp. 389-391, for a listing of novels and story collections relevant to the supernatural and the grotesque.

[2] Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1982, directed by Tobe Hooper, screenplay by Steven Spielberg, Michael Grais, and Mark Victor.

[3] Angela Gray, *Nightmare at Riverview* (NY: Magnum Books, 1973). The introduction to G. Richard Thompson, ed., *Romantic Gothic Tales 1790-1840* (NY: Harper and Row Perennial Library, 1979), pp. 1-54, provides an efficient overview of the genre's history. An interesting interpretation of the modern Gothic novel is found in Joanna Russ, "Somebody's Trying to Kill Me and I Think It's My Husband: The Modern Gothic," *Journal of Popular Culture*, 6 (Spring 1973), 666-691.

[4] Lyda Belknap Long, *To the Dark Tower* (NY: Prestige Books, 1969).

[5] A useful discussion of the reflexive response elicited by folk and popular literature and the reflective response elicited by sophisticated literature appears in Roger D. Abrahams and George Foss, *Anglo-American Folksong Style* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968), pp. 5-11.

[6] *Time*, Sept. 6, 1982, p. 67.

[7] See Louis C. Jones, *Things That Go Bump in the Night* (NY: Hill and Wang, 1969), for an interesting collection of traditional American ghost stories. However, William Lynwood Montell, *Ghosts along the Cumberland: Deathlore in the Kentucky Foothills* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1975), is a more reliable collection of supernatural legend texts because it includes unedited narratives collected and transcribed from oral tradition.

[8] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968).

[9] *National Enquirer*, Sept. 28, 1982, pp. 37 and 7, respectively.

[10] See Chap. IV, "Defoe, Mrs. Veal, and Mrs. Bargrave," in Rodney M. Baine, *Daniel Defoe and the Supernatural* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1968), pp. 91-108, for a fascinating discussion of Defoe's account.

[11] "The Apparition of Mrs. Veal," in *Classic Ghost Stories by Charles Dickens and Others* (NY: Dover Publications, 1975), p. 207.

[12] In Eric S. Rabkin, ed., *Fantastic Worlds: Myths, Tales, and Stories* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 284-293.

[13] In *Best Ghost Stories of Algernon Blackwood* (NY: Dover Publications, 1973), pp. 228-239.

[14] Stephen King, *Carrie* (NY: New American Library, 1975) and *Carrie*, United Artists, 1976, directed by Brian De Palma, screenplay by Lawrence D. Cohen; *'Salem's Lot* (NY: New American Library, 1976) and *'Salem's Lot*, CBS-TV, 1979, directed by Tobe Hooper, screenplay by Paul Monash; *The Shining* (NY: New American Library, 1978) and *The Shining*, Warner Brothers, 1980, directed by Stanley Kubrick, screenplay by Stanley Kubrick and Diane Johnson; Peter Straub, *Ghost Story* (NY: Pocket Books, 1979) and *Ghost Story*, Universal Studios, 1981, directed by John Irvin, screenplay by Lawrence D. Cohen.

[15] Straub originally planned to include versions of Hawthorne's "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" and Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" in the novel. Noted in *Stephen King's Danse Macabre*, p. 245.

[16] *Stephen King's Danse Macabre*, p. 251.

Strategies for Teaching Agatha Christie's *Curtain*

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Before turning to strategies *for* teaching Agatha Christie's last and one of her best Hercule Poirot mysteries, *Curtain* (1975; rpt. New York: Simon and Shuster, pb, 1976), we would like to mention the strategy *behind* our teaching of the novel. While the argument that detective fiction and other popular literary kinds have their place in the humanities curriculum as surely as do sonnets, absurdist plays, or any other genre might well be offered (we are certainly persuaded by it), we read *Curtain* with our students for a different reason: Whodunits are prime vehicles for practicing careful and analytical reading of literature. As a text through which students are introduced to the critical analysis of literature, *Curtain* presents, in bold relief, the elements of fiction: setting, character, narrative and theme. What is more, the very popularity of the novel is proof of the writer's ability to engage readers. And at this time when so much literary criticism concentrates on reader response, we are urged to investigate the processes by which Christie's readers — be they described, according to reader criticism, as "fit," "naive," "competent," "ideal" or whatever — are actually involved in the mystery. That is, we explore with our students how it is that the reader is encouraged to become a detective and actively experience suspense and fear as well as the satisfaction of discovering the outcome of the case.

Suspense, the key to any mystery's emotional as well as mental engagement of the reader, is created and sustained not only by balancing what information is divulged through clues and what is suppressed or made light of but also by drawing mysterious setting and characters. In *Curtain* a presentiment of danger hangs over the out-of-the-way, decaying boarding house in the Essex village of Styles St. Mary. This self-contained environment from which Christie never removes her narrator, detective, and murderer has once before housed a murder, and the ghost casts a pall over the guests, who all are aware of the earlier poisoning: "Evil imaginings came easily to the mind there. There was, too, not only the past,

but a sinister present. The shadow of murder and murderer haunted the house" (p. 148). What is more, the reader finds out early on that more violence will soon be part of the history of the house. Detective Hercule Poirot tells his friend Captain Arthur Hastings, both of whom were on hand for the first murder, that another murder will shortly be committed at Styles. Setting, then, creates the atmosphere of suspense central to the novel's success.

> Here, within these walls, in these gardens, thoughts of murder had lingered and grown stronger and had at last come to fruition in the final act. Did they still taint the air? (p. 76)

The first chapter of *Curtain* offers an excellent text for teaching the student to take notice of how a writer introduces his setting and the resulting effects of his choices. The narrator Hastings, and accordingly the reader, slowly descends upon the seemingly dormant old house; he approaches the town by train and then the house itself by taxi. His comments as he takes in the scenery serve to reinforce both the present stagnation and the sense of history connected with the deteriorating place. Remembered and immediate time and place weigh heavy on Hastings' mind as he walks into the house and then upstairs to knock at the door of his old friend Poirot. Thus firmly rooted in the oppressive house, the reader is ready to begin the game of detection that awaits, and the closeness and uneasiness that confine the guests remain important throughout the novel. Approaching storms, enveloping showers, and relief-bringing "breaks" in the weather portend future events and parallel characters' moods.

As the reader must focus on the time and place of the crime, he must also attend to the people who populate the scene. Collected together at Styles Court are a dozen characters from whom the murderer must be identified. They are not a happy group but a "collection of twilit people. *Grey heads, grey hearts, grey dreams*" (p. 101). Almost to a one, they are suited to the decaying house; and since all are under suspicion, all must be scrutinized and their motivations and personalities weighed against one another. Thus Christie's novel is a nearly perfect tool for teaching readers to observe the writer's techniques of characterization. The proprietors of the hotel, Colonel and Mrs. Luttrell, are revealed by their actions, specifically their bridge-playing habits. The watchful narrator recognizes that their larger relationship is reflected by their partnership in this game:

> He was what I should describe as a moderate player, but inclined to be forgetful. Every now and then he would make some really bad mistake owing to this. But playing with his wife, he made mistake after mistake without ceasing. He was obviously nervous

> of her, and this caused him to play about three times as badly as was normal.... Mrs. Luttrell herself was a very good player indeed, though a rather unpleasant one to play with. She snatched every conceivable advantage, ignoring the rules if her adversary was unaware of them, and enforced them immediately when they served her.... At cards her self-restraint failed, and her tongue lashed every mistake her wretched husband made. (pp. 60-61)

Many of the other characters are sketched more directly, through what others comment about them or what they themselves say. Major Allerton is unanimously reported to be a womanizer and a cad, "the sort of fellow who would skin his grandmother. And all glossed over with this superficial charm of manners" (p. 41). Similarly, the invalid Mrs. Franklin is a petulant attention-seeker, a selfish and childish woman who "certainly enjoys bad health" according to another guest. While Allerton and Mrs. Franklin never admit what they are, Judith Hastings and Dr. Franklin expose themselves in their public remarks on divorce, euthanasia, social Darwinism. To her father's consternation, Judith, for example, proclaims her acceptance of murder:

> To begin with I don't hold life as sacred as all you people do. Unfit lives, useless lives — they should be got out of the way. There's so much mess about. Only people who can make a decent contribution to the community ought to be allowed to live. The others ought to be put painlessly away. (p. 142)

Hercule Poirot, because he is in the foreground, is a particularly interesting character study. As in earlier Christie Whodunits, the retired Belgian police agent is in his last case uniformly respected by those in his company. And by himself — the little man's vanity and self-esteem and his impatience with less astute minds have not abated despite his advancing years and declining health. His jet black, artificial hair and moustaches are telling signals, as is his forthright (and accurate) assertion that "the core is still sound.... My brain, it still functions magnificently" (p. 15). Full of self-confidence, he summons Hastings to serve as his "eyes and ears" and sets up their second game of detection at Styles. Poirot has made all the preparations for the case; he carries his dispatch case with notes and newspaper clippings of five earlier unnatural deaths and sits back to wait for murder to come again. The man of the "grey cells" is in such complete control that it is fair to say that he, even more than the killer he stalks, is the orchestrator of the goings on at Styles.

What makes the Poirot of *Curtain* especially interesting are the eyes through which we see the detective: the entire affair at Styles is presented to us by Hastings. For Hastings, Styles is a house full

of memories not only of a murder he solved with Poirot but also of his concurrent courtship of his recently deceased and greatly beloved wife. Thus he is particularly moved by the haunting atmosphere of the place, and he is also greatly affected by the debilitated condition of his old friend. Despite Poirot's domineering ways, Hastings is never certain that the detective is in full charge of his grey cells:

> Once or twice, while dressing, I had asked myself if possibly Poirot had imagined the whole thing. After all, the dear old chap was an old man now and sadly broken in health. He himself might declare his brain was as sound as ever — but in point of fact, was it? His whole life had been spent in tracking down crime. Would it really be surprising if, in the end, he was to fancy crimes where no crimes were? ... What more likely wishful thinking — a perfectly reasonable neurosis. (p. 37)

Since Poirot refuses to share all of his preliminary findings, Hastings must take the detective's word that a murder will be committed and that he still possesses the acumen to track down Mr. X. Christie's double-edged portrayal of her renowned character contributes to the suspense of the novel by raising the reader's doubts about who is to be trusted.

Hastings can be studied as more than a means for characterizing Poirot; he can also be used to teach point of view. Christie's first-person narrator follows the Watsonian tradition in detective fiction, a conventional technique for creating suspense by removing the reader from the consciousness of the all-knowing or else quick-to-learn detective. Hastings is a careful, competent reporter of the facts; he has a good memory and, after all, has been brought onto the case by Poirot. He is, moreover, respected by the other guests. Yet he is shown in many ways to be ineffectual and imperceptive, as much a part of the "twilit collection" as any other guest. By his own confession he is but half the man he was before his wife's death:

> Without her, I felt miserably inadequate. The responsibility for their [children's] safety and happiness was mine. Would I be equal to that task? I was not, Heaven help me, a clever man. I blundered — made mistakes. (p. 63)

The source of his worry in the passage above, his beautiful and headstrong daughter Judith, who he frets could easily have been involved in one of the murders that eventually take place at Styles, provides another measure of Hastings' judgment. He bungles his efforts to counsel her, even to understand who it is she's in love with. And Poirot mercilessly attacks the narrator more often than he compliments him:

> You are obstinate and extremely stupid and I wish that there were someone else whom I could trust, but I suppose I shall have to put up with you and your absurd ideas of fair play. Since you cannot use your grey cells as you do not possess them, at any rate use your eyes, your ears and your nose if need be in so far as the dictates of honour allow. (p. 91)

Who is the disoriented, uncertain reader to trust, the ailing, proud little detective or the healthy self-effacing narrator who often seems oblivious to human nature? The reader ***must*** weigh the evidence and draw his own conclusions if he is to begin to piece together and participate in the crime solving.

The narrative structure of *Curtain,* like those of most successful Whodunits, is a tightly woven fabric of meaningful and distracting events. The novel's delicate balance of legitimate clues and red herrings keeps the reader intellectually involved and interested in the narrative. Indeed, it is the essential task of the reader of detective fiction to reconstruct the making of the story — he must search for the motivations of actions, determine which actions are significant, and finally rearrange events chronologically in order to prove or disprove his suspicions.

The presentation of events in *Curtain* provides ample material for discussing the staples of sound plotting: exposition, conflict, climax, denouement, and — most importantly — complication and suspense. Exposition and denouement are neatly handled in the first chapters and the postscript of the novel. Since Hastings is the last to arrive at Styles House, he (and thus the reader) must quickly be informed of who is there and what is to happen. Several characters tell him essential information about his fellow boarders, but Poirot, of course, is solely responsible for filling in the pertinent facts regarding the upcoming murder. (He does so in characteristic fashion, with a cogent summary of the five murders already committed by X, presently a guest at the house.) At the end of the novel, it is once again up to Poirot to unravel the evidence and explain the murderous course of events and even to identify the murderer. The denouement in detective fiction is seldom anticlimactic, and the one here, which comes in the form of a letter from Poirot to Hastings read four months after the detective's death, is no exception. It answers so many unanswered questions that it must be studied painstakingly by the reader who wants to compare his conclusions with the mastermind's surprising revelations.

Christie's structure is elaborate; the basic conflict between the murderer and detective is there, but in *Curtain* that conflict is unique. Poirot knows his prey and knows he will strike again

soon — what he does not know is why the murderer kills and who the next victim will be. A further complication is that the *reader* does not know whom he is after, since the detective will not disclose that secret to Hastings. In addition to the standard conflict between detective and murderer, there is Poirot's race against time: Can the murderer be unnerved before he strikes? (He cannot. By the end of the novel three new deaths have been recorded at Styles.) Can Poirot finish his case before the final, looming heart attack kills him? Because of the number of variables involved, suspense is maintained throughout the long waiting period in the first part of *Curtain* on to the climax (the death of X followed by the death of Poirot) to the end of the posthumous reading of Poirot's solutions.

Finally, *Curtain* provides fruitful material for discussing themes in literature. As with so much else in the novel, readers must use their grey cells to infer what underlies Christie's setting, characters, and situations. And there is true intellectual engagement, for the theme is more than the easy answer that good triumphs over evil. There is no such certainty in *Curtain*. Poirot is not unflappable: in this last case he experiences doubt, which is the feeling and subject that underlies the entire novel. Just before he dies, this man — who had pointed out at the beginning that what links the five earlier murders is the fact that there was *no doubt* in any of the cases — comes to doubt profoundly the answer to his last case, the solution he himself brought about by committing murder:

> I do not know, Hastings, if what I have done is justified or not justified. No — I do not know. I do not believe that a man should take the law into his own hands. . . .
>
> But on the other hand, I *am* the law! . . . By taking Norton's life, I have saved other lives — innocent lives. But still I do not know. . . . It is perhaps right that I should not know. I have always been so sure — too sure. . . .
>
> But now I am very humble and I say like a little child: "I do not know. . . ." (pp. 278-79)

The blurring of such distinctions as right and wrong, law and crime — that is, the existence of doubt — makes for a theme worth discovering and considering well. Through Hercule Poirot's uncharacteristic admission of his own doubts readers are made to entertain doubt about more than the outcome of the case; they must share the deep-seated uneasiness left by this second affair at Styles and its doubt-full resolution. Reflecting on this uneasiness after she has put down the book, one of our students went on to posit that the sense of loss and chaos that pervades the novel mirrors the British perspective at the end of World War II, when Christie composed her fiction.

Our consideration of the ways in which the Whodunit can be used to introduce students to literature is necessarily brief, confined as it is to only one representative text. We suggest that other popular novels of detection can be similarly used to help students read closely and come to terms with their own participation in literary texts. To be sure, there are many ways in which courses in literature could use mysteries. Novels from different milieus, times, and places might be incorporated — e.g., "The Mystery of Marie Roget," *Farewell, My Lovely,* and *Murder Must Advertise.* This varied selection would provide students with a broad base for testing their literary responses. It would also encourage them to take notice of the special appeals of formula fiction.

Another possibility is the combination of visual and written detective narratives, since so many of the classic Whodunits have been turned into frequently rerun movies and television shows — e.g., *Farewell, My Lovely, The Long Goodbye, Murder on the Orient Express, Death on the Nile,* the Dorothy Sayers novels (four were produced for television by BBC), the Erle Stanley Gardner series. Why not consider the elements of fictional narrative from several vantage points: How is character portrayed on the screen and on the page? How is setting created and used in the different media? How is point of view developed in each?

However used, *Curtain,* we conclude, is substantial and evocative material for the literature course. Well written and widely read, it provides an excellent context for consideration of the elements of prose fiction and the dynamics of literary response.

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Pairing the "Classics" with Detective Fiction

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Detective literature can be very helpful in teaching students about form in literature and about reading a novel for a theme. In teaching an introductory topics course in literature, I chose to focus on this genre since I found that students can be made aware of the moral content of detective novels as well as learn how to read more "classic" works like *Crime and Punishment* more enjoyably.

Teaching both popular literature and "classic" literature in the same course can also help to clear up some of the students' misconceptions about their differences. Most students seem to think that one reads "real" literature for a theme, for symbolism, for "literary" purposes, but that one reads detective fiction for action or plot. They realize that someone must enjoy the "greats"; unfortunately, they don't seem to rank themselves in that number. They know that they can enjoy detective literature; however, detective

novels are every bit as theme-laden (if not more so) than the novels that they believe they are to read for a meaning.

The thematic content of the detective novel becomes apparent when we discuss the methods that the detective uses to discover the criminal. Many detectives, like Sherlock Holmes, use reason and deduction; others, like Dupin and Lord Peter Wimsey, use a combination of tools, such as reason and intuition, to find the criminal. Since the detective in the detective novel is the protagonist (and a "good" protagonist, as well), we see his moral values tested by the problem of the crime. Since at the end of the story, the detective's set of moral values has helped him to solve the crime, the obvious conclusion is that his values are preferable to those of any other character.

The murderer's motives and methods also illustrate thematic issues in the literature. In Dorothy Sayers' *Whose Body?*, the murderer is a scientist whose anger toward anti-vivisectionists is partially assuaged by putting the body of his victim in an anti-vivisectionist's bathtub. This murderer is also known for his completely empirical view of the world; there is no soul, there is no conscience in the spiritual sense, according to Sir Julian Freke. The murderer in Dashiell Hammett's "The Girl with the Silver Eyes" is a woman who tries to seduce the detective, the Continental Op, in order to "beat the rap." Against the stalwart Op, she, of course, fails.

The murderer's wickedness can usually be measured in terms of the victim's. If the victim is "good," the murderer is usually more evil than he/she is if the victim is wicked. When the victim is truly wicked, the murderer is often portrayed as a victim himself. One of the best examples of this phenomenon is Nicholas Blake's *The Corpse in the Snowman*, where the only victim of murder is a drug-pushing blackmailer, and the murderer is a good person who atones for his murder by rushing off to the front to fight Hitler. Even in cases like this, however, the murderer is still the antagonist; he is still the character most interested in thwarting the detective.

The themes in the "classic" novels are usually not as obvious or simple as are those in the detective fiction, but after their form has been discussed in comparison to that of the detective novels, the "classic" works can be dealt with thematically. The first thing that we discover in class is that the protagonist is seldom the detective and the murderer is seldom the antagonist. In *Crime and Punishment*, for example, Raskolnikov is both the protagonist and the antagonist, and the character who toys with him is the detective,

Porfiry Petrovich. But we can discuss themes by analyzing the motives and methods of the murderer. Raskolnikov uses a utilitarian (or reasonable) argument to justify his committing a murder, and Petrovich suspects him because he has read this argument in Raskolnikov's article, "On Crime." Petrovich uses psychology as well as some reason to decide that Raskolnikov is the killer. In *The Scarlet Letter,* the adulteress, Hester Prynne, is the protagonist, while her wronged husband, Roger Chillingworth, is the antagonist.

Once again, the victim is important to our moral evaluation of the work: Hester seems to be the victim of her own crime, while Dimmesdale is obviously Chillingworth's victim, rather than Chillingsworth being Dimmesdale's. In *Crime and Punishment,* Raskolnikov's rational argument for murder seems sound for the death of Alyona, but it breaks down for the unanticipated murder of Lizaveta. Raskolnikov also seems to be the victim of Porfiry Petrovich, the detective, as well as of himself.

As is shown by this brief summary, the moral questions in these novels are less simple and less easily resolved than are the questions raised by the detective novels. The questions raised by the detective novels, however, are not any less present. Since the questions raised by the detective fiction are often the same questions raised by the "classics," the detective novels can help prepare the students for the problems when they are raised by the more complex literature.

Assignments for this type of course can be much easier on both the students and the teacher than a more typical literature assignment. I have gone to a less rigid format for these assignments and emphasized formal rather than thematic content. Having students rewrite a short passage from one of the novels or short stories from another character's point of view can be illuminating and entertaining both for the students and for me. I have also found that this assignment produces better-written papers than a more usual expository assignment. The most common rhetorical errors in these papers are tense shifts (no doubt because the student has never dealt with narrative writing before) and the ever-present commas. The student has to do as much work or more work than he/she would do writing a theme paper: he/she must not only analyze the use of point of view in the passage, he/she must recognize and make the possible changes that result when the story is told from a different point of view. The student must also analyze the character whose point of view he/she is using.

Another assignment that I have had good results with is that of

having the students explain how they would change a "great" novel like *Crime and Punishment* to make it into a detective novel. One of the requirements of this assignment is that they leave the thematic content intact and make only formal changes (narration, setting, point of view) in the novel. The results of this exercise are more varied than one might be tempted to believe at first thought. Once again the students do as much work as they would if I had asked them to discuss reason in *Crime and Punishment* and *Whose Body?*, and I suspect that they do more, simply because it is more fun for them to analyze what the differences are in form between the two and how *Crime and Punishment* would have to be changed.

I must admit that I prefer grading these assignments to grading more "traditional" assignments. As I have said, they are better written, and they have usually been thought out better than some thematic assignments I have received. I also get very few papers that are alike, even when students write on the same scene or the same book.

I believe that this method gives the students a more open mind about the literature, thus allowing them to recognize why the great novels are great entertainment as well as great thought, and why detective novels have more than an action story between their covers.

Fantasy Literature: A Resource for the Unimaginative

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Most teachers think of fantasy literature as either fairy tales for very young children or the science fiction books that the science buffs carry around next to their calculator cases. These descriptions are no doubt accurate, but teachers should not dismiss fantasy merely because it seems to have a limited audience. In fact, it is quite possible to capitalize on the interests of this limited audience both for its own benefit and for the benefit of other students as well. That the brightest and most intense students like fantasy should be a clue for us as teachers. Thus I have entitled this article "a resource for the unimaginative" because fantasy literature can be a simple, almost formulaic, entry vehicle for our students who

hesitate at the idea of reading great literature. Fantasy, by its nature, takes the reader back to what is deepest and strongest in world literature.

Note, for example, that these same bright students are the ones who spend hours playing Dungeons and Dragons or whatever new variation on that game has just broken the market. What is the basic theme of Dungeons and Dragons? The hero's quest for treasure through dangers and disasters. The treasure can be something tangible, or it can be some sort of profound meaning, as it is in that quest of all quests, the search for the Grail. Perhaps it is common knowledge among teachers (but I think not) that the source for Dungeons and Dragons was J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. Most D and D players will have that bit of information tucked away somewhere in their massive files of strategies and plans. What the D and D players usually do not know is that Tolkien's sources for *Lord of the Rings* include most of the major literary works available to western humanity. I suppose a subtitle for this article could be "if you like Tolkien, you're going to love *Beowulf*." The results are not foolproof, but they are worth a try.

Let me begin by listing the best fantasy (in my opinion) of the twentieth century. This list will be by no means exhaustive, nor will my choices agree with those ot any other teacher of fantasy literature. The list will, however, help the teacher who is trying to get acquainted with the field.

Lloyd Alexander	The Taran Wanderer series
Ray Bradbury	*The Martian Chronicles*
	Something Wicked This Way Comes
Susan Cooper	The Dark Is Rising series
Ursula K. LeGuin	The Earthsea trilogy
C. S. Lewis	The Chronicles of Narnia
	Out of the Silent Planet
	Perelandra
	That Hideous Strength
Anne McCaffrey	Dragon series
Walter M. Miller, Jr.	*A Canticle for Leibowitz*
J. R. R. Tolkien	*The Hobbit*
	The Lord of the Rings

These books are my personal favorites. I pick among them when choosing modern texts for my fantasy literature course. Again, I want to stress that the list is extremely selective, rather than representative.

More importantly, the fantasy course that I teach never includes exclusively modern works. Herein is the value of fantasy mentioned earlier. First, teachers should keep in mind that fantasy has been a side concern of literature for only about three hundred years. Before that time all literature was fantasy of one sort or another. This argument will often perk up students' interest and make them take a more appreciative look at works written before the twentieth century. Most of Shakespeare's plays teach very well as fantasy literature, especially *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *The Tempest*. *The Tempest* works especially well because it has every element that a fantasy fan could want: a magician, a monster, a king, a hero, noble tasks to be done to win a fair lady, charms, spirits, and intrigue.

The teacherly plot is simple. First you get your students to read the captivating modern fantasies, even those students who do not carry calculators. Then you introduce them to the older fantasies. Notice, by the way, that a good deal of fantasy is written by women authors. Often those who do not know fantasy literature think that mostly boys read it because so many of the more well-known stories do appeal to the young male. The stories by women appeal to both sexes, however, and can attract the young woman who has never been able to get through the first ten pages of *Lord of the Rings*.

When the young reader begins to see the appeal in the fantasy of his or her choice, it is easy to make the transfer to that fantasy mentioned earlier that dominates literature before the eighteenth century. In addition to Shakespeare, Greek and Norse mythology are obvious sources of fantasy. Most of the modern fantasy heroes are clearly derivatives of mythological characters. *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* provide rich adventure, and most students see the sources for their modern heroes in the godlike adventurers of these Greek classics. Finally, the teacher can suit his or her own taste and that of the students in picking and choosing from literature ranging from Homer to Hawthorne.

Fantasy themes lend themselves to a variety of approaches. For example, teachers who want to be inventive can have some fun with an English literature course. Beginning with *Beowulf* students can begin to look for the heroic adventure themes as they weave themselves throughout English literature. In *Beowulf* the hero meets monster and wicked witch figure, fights a dragon, and finally dies as a sacrifice for his kingdom. Beowulf is obliging because he works well as both king and hero. Tolkien picked up this point when he created his hero/king Aragorn in *Lord of the Rings*. One

could go on for several volumes comparing *Beowulf* to *Lord of the Rings*, however, so it is best to get on with the fantasy themes in English literature.

Next come the Arthurian legends which, of course, pick up on the same hero, king, and sacrificial motifs. Then Chaucer provides a wealth of fantasy; perhaps just a mention of the Knight's Tale or the Nun's Priest's Tale would suffice. By Chaucer's time the courtly love theme had begun to be mixed with the heroic tales, making quite a different type of fantasy from that of *Beowulf*. The adventure and daring quests are still there, however, though the love for the lady has now become the controlling motif rather than the need to save the society and homeland. Magic does not play such a strong role in Chaucer, but in his anonymous contemporary who wrote the tale of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the magical elements carry the tale. The Green Knight is as great a warrior as Beowulf but as fine a magician as Shakespeare's Prospero or Tolkien's Gandalf. My point is that students can have really exciting times with literature watching these same types of heroes and sorcerers grow and change throughout English literature.

In fact, the motifs do not get lost after Shakespeare's day; they just fall out of the mainstream, or they take on rather strange guises such as that of Gulliver on his adventure or of Tom Jones searching through London for his fair Sophia. With the Victorians fantasy comes back to the foreground in the works of Tennyson who picks up on the fantasy motifs of the Romantic poets and makes them into his great version of the Arthurian legends. Then here we are at the twentieth century again with Ulysses reappearing in mainstream literature, mythology popping up in children's literature, and all of the fantasy motifs appearing in the fantasy literature enjoyed by those kids with the calculators.

This example of a British literature course all built around fantasy may be too much for the average English teacher to bear, but it does give that teacher some idea of what can be done with that already present interest in fantasy. Throughout this paper I have mentioned the themes of fantasy literature. Some teachers may have painful memories, or even happy memories, of Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* or of Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. These works underlie the following list of themes, but no teacher has to take time to go back to the sources; the uses are what is important here.

Fantasy themes

the quest (always for some sacred goal, may destroy the quester)

the hero (often has special powers, sometimes has fatal weakness)
the magician (usually of unknown birth and origins, often gives up human joys for magic)
the dragon (hoards jewels and likes riddles)
the heroine (she comes later in fantasy literature; the hero does noble deeds to win her)
the king (the welfare of the land depends on the health of the king)
the sacrifice (the king or hero or both may have to die to save land or the people)
the sidekick (stands by the hero-king no matter what, often has to take over after the sacrifice)
the talisman (often the hero's sword, the thing that protects the hero from harm)
the witch (she embodies evil, usually has irrational hatred for humans

The reader might argue that if he or she spends a few minutes thinking about literature, everything begins to look like fantasy. Huck Finn goes on a quest, and the Indian guide in Faulkner's *The Bear* is a kind of folk magician. Even if students do play the the game of finding the motifs in all sorts of unlikely places (one cannot think too long about TV's *Dallas*), they will at least start to understand what themes in literature are. Many might even want to read some of those "older" works that they had ignored before. At best, they may see that the popularity of fantasy literature shows that humans do still respond to those themes which have always evoked the best in any reader's responses.

The Classroom Potential of SF

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Science fiction (SF) today intrudes upon everyone's consciousness via television and movies, and virtually all book stores have special sections that are both well stocked and well frequented. Faced with this popular but previously denigrated type of literature, educators may react by (1) ignoring it, (2) utilizing it to fulfill educational goals or (3) trying to counteract it. Just what is SF, and what is to be gained or lost by each of these approaches?

Science fiction may seem to be somewhat misnamed. Although the typical fan insists that SF is based on scientific fact and often the writers are scientists, Isaac Asimov being a prime example, skeptical readers can usually find elements in a SF selection that have no basis in scientific fact. However, a good SF work does not contain factual background or assumptions known to be false at the time it was written. For example, in the early twentieth century, much SF portrayed Mars as having intelligent life of about human size. This view was a response to the theories of Percival Lowell of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology who had observed Martian "canals." Now that recent space studies have indicated that such life forms do not exist on Mars, SF writers are no longer using them to people the planet.

However, a relationship to science is only one aspect of SF. Readers are not drawn to it primarily because they are searching for scientific facts. If they were, they would be reading a text on physics or the latest issue of the *Journal of Biological Chemistry*. Thomas A. Easton, in a feature for the SF magazine *Analog*, defined this type of literature as a "projection of the possible or the plausible, not necessarily the probable." SF is often set in the far away — another very different time and place. It usually has a speculative, highly imaginative and sometimes even fantastic quality and requires a lot of what Coleridge termed a "willing suspension of disbelief." Rather than "science fiction," the initials are sometimes said to stand for "speculative fiction" or "science fantasy," but the latter terminology is often resented by fans who feel that the connotations are derogatory.

Avid readers insist that speculation, imagination and fantasy are integral to the scientific mind. Nor are they alone in their insistence. Mathematician Jacob Bronowski pointed out that people had known long before Newton that apples fell down rather than up and that it was his ability to conjecture rather than his factual knowledge that made him a great scientist. Bronowski said, "His first step was a leap of imagination — to lift himself from the earth, and put himself wildly, speculatively into the sun." Certainly today's science, as well as science fiction, stretches the imagination. Would anyone's grandfather have believed that men could walk on the moon? Is there anything in SF more outlandish than the scientific concepts of anti-matter and the pulsating universe?

SF, despite increasing recognition, still functions largely as a separate entity within contemporary American literature, having its own magazines, such as *Analog* and *Galaxy*, and critical awards, the Hugos and Nebulas. What should English teachers do about

this literature with a popularity almost as fantastic as its plots? Many tend to ignore it. The average teacher, however, has not been prepared to handle SF in the classroom. This literature is different. It is neither rosily romantic nor a portrayal of everyday life. It has definite flaws when judged by what fans call "mainstream" standards. Plots are not plausible. Characters may not only be flat and lacking in human individuality but may not be human at all! For teachers SF may be unfamiliar literary territory that requires time to explore. Another disadvantage is that SF may not appeal to all members of a class, but does any story appeal to everyone? Also teachers may believe that class time is better spent on "classics." Certainly all time available for literature should not be spent on SF. But ignoring it altogether has two important drawbacks. First, whenever a teacher ignores something as popular as SF is currently, students tend to view the teacher as "not with it." Second, SF does have a strong appeal to some students who might otherwise be largely non-readers, students who consider the novels and stories usually assigned them dull and slow moving.

Fast action, as well as unusual action, is typical of SF. Unfortunately the emphasis on action and the fact that SF frequently has "alien" characters often result in flat, almost stereotyped characterizations. However, the lack of real, three-dimensional humans in some, especially the shorter, SF works may not be felt to be a disadvantage by adolescent readers as it is by teachers. Being younger, the students may not yet have learned to evaluate on a multi-dimensional level the personalities that people their real existence. Adolescents may need to be met where they are and from there gradually moved onward. Science fiction can capture the interest of many to whom ordinary fiction has seemed to offer little. Once intrigued, a young mind is more readily educated.

SF, like any type of literature, will improve reading speed and comprehension, thus making other literature more accessible and attractive. Vocabulary improvement is likely to exceed that achieved by reading the average newspaper, magazine or best seller. Except for SF especially written for juveniles, the vocabulary is extensive; and words are usually used in such a way that meaning can be guessed from context — a desirable trait since most adolescents are not likely to read with a dictionary at hand whatever their teachers may recommend.

The empathy and objectivity of the readers may also be increased. Many SF stories begin by having the reader identify with a main character who seems much like himself and later disclose that the hero is an alien covered with feathers or fur. One example

is the novel *Star Surgeon* by Alan Nourse. The movie *E.T.* clearly holds up for admiration young Eliot's sympathy for the alien with the unappealing exterior. In a well known *Star Trek* television episode, half-black and half-white creatures that seem identical to the viewer are determined to kill one another for no discernable reason. Finally at the end of the show one character says that it should be obvious why he is trying to kill the other; that one is black on the wrong side. Suddenly the viewer realizes that the creatures he thought were identical are mirror-images. Social implications are certainly plain. Well selected SF may lead adolescents to examine their tendencies to categorize others into "our kind" and "their kind" and to see that outside appearances are not appropriate indications of hearts and minds.

Increased self-knowledge through introspection may also be gained. Reading and discussion of Ursula LeGuin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* encourages examinations of sexual roles and stereotypes as well as motivations for wars. The aliens in the first part of Isaac Asimov's *The Gods Themselves* are of three kinds; creatures who are intelligent but emotionally cold with little conscience, those who are warm-hearted and anxious to do right in spite of weakness, and those who seem to value the production and rearing of the young over everything. As the novel progresses, these fuse into one highly effective being. Such a novel leads readers to examine themselves for these aspects of personality and encourages them to see that a personality needs to be integrated and balanced in order to be an effective whole. The *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* movies, with their initiation into manhood themes and their treatments of Oedipal conflicts, may also further self-knowledge.

But, paradoxically considering the settings, perhaps the most important educational function of SF is that it can be used to familiarize students in an interesting and enjoyable way with contemporary problems, many of which involve science or technology. Why not use works by Faulkner, Hemingway and Steinbeck to fulfill this purpose? Adolescent readers may not yet be equipped emotionally to handle the suffering and despair that abound in the works of many twentieth-century authors whom the critics acclaim. Today's young readers have grown up knowing not only that man as an individual is mortal but that nuclear weapons have made mankind itself mortal. That knowledge is likely to have affected, at least on the unconscious level, even those young people whose minds seem to have nothing in them but trivia. Adolescents may feel threatened and anxious. They may turn away from a consideration of current problems because they seem too overwhelming. Thus,

critically esteemed contemporary literature may be too painful for them to deal with directly. The exotic settings and other fantastic qualities of SF provide the kind of artistic distance that literature has sought to achieve in the past. In ancient Greece dramatists had the most violent actions narrated by a chorus rather than presented onstage, thus avoiding what Aristotle called "the spectacular." In Japanese drama the most realistic dialogue was to be found in the puppet plays because the puppets, not being realistic characters, could use true-to-life dialogue without violating what the Japanese considered the intent of art, stylization of life. In the guise of SF one finds treatments of such issues as overpopulation (*The Naked Sun* by Isaac Asimov), the ethics of genetic engineering (*Joshua, Son of None* by Nancy Freedman and *Mutants* by Robert Silverberg), and the use of behavior mod and mass media to control the population (*Revolt in 2100* by Robert A. Heinlein). Of course various problems associated with nuclear energy occur frequently with most SF containing some references to fusion or fission. Good SF can also lead to an interest in history and the historical background of contemporary society. For example, *Dune* by Frank Herbert might attract students to the history of Islam; and *A Canticle for Leibowitz* by Walter M. Miller, Jr., might encourage a study of the Dark Ages.

Another characteristic of SF that young readers like is its positive, even optimistic view of humanity. This view contrasts with the pessimism and cynicism of much highly acclaimed contemporary literature. SF writers have placed people in various fantastic places but never in garbage cans as did Samuel Beckett in his play *Endgame*. Although William Faulkner said when accepting his Nobel prize, "Man will not merely endure; he will prevail," young readers may be unable to see that much prevailing takes place in a novel like *The Sound and the Fury*. In the popular SF, however, heroes are still plentiful. Man clearly endures and prevails — possibly on another planet. And right and wrong are as clearly distinguishable as in Shakespeare's world.

Of course a teacher should not overuse SF. Even an elective mini-course of totally SF might be questionable since it probably would appeal primarily to those students already fans and in its separation would not be likely to achieve another objective, that of leading students to other types of reading. More effective would be the reading of SF short stories and novels and discussions of movies and television programs within the regular English curriculum. Students can be led skillfully from interest in SF to interest in other fiction with themes or subjects similar to those they have

just enjoyed. Also, they may want to read other books by the same author. Certainly a student who wants more books by Isaac Asimov may be kept busy for quite some time and cover a large range of subjects!

With so much to be gained, SF should be included in the English curriculum. However, there are aspects that may need to be counteracted also. One is the tendency on the part of some students to read nothing but SF. A bright student with such a mind-set could perhaps be given George Orwell's *1984* and then encouraged to read other works by Orwell such as *Animal Farm* and "Shooting an Elephant." Another problem is that some students, perhaps because of the terminology "science fiction," tend to confuse fact and fiction in this literature. Some have even argued that "transporting" as done in *Star Trek* is now scientifically possible!

Thus, it is desirable to stress the "fiction" at least as much as the "science" when defining and teaching SF and to help young readers sort out which is which. Because of this possibility of confusion, SF is probably not a good tool for teaching science itself, at least not unless the English teacher is teamed with a science teacher. Students can be encouraged to use the school library in their efforts to distinguish fact from fiction. Many an exciting and education search can result. Certainly SF, skillfully taught, can be a stimulating means of achieving educational goals.

The Novels of S. E. Hinton: Popular Fiction for Adolescents

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Nearly fifteen years have gone by since Ponyboy Curtis "stepped out into the bright sunlight from the darkness of the movie house" —and thereby altered the course of adolescent fiction. S. E. Hinton was only seventeen years old when she published *The Outsiders*. She presented teenagers who were both tough and sensitive and who functioned in a world almost completely lacking in parents or other adult authority figures. Her novel gave epic proportion to the gang warfare between the "Socs" and the "greasers" — the "have's" and the "have not's." Hinton's viewpoint was that of a teenager and that of a woman. The result was an immediate best seller which was popular with both boys and girls.

However, back in 1967, Miss Hinton's readers did not realize the sex of the author since she used only her initials S. E., and her publisher was careful not to use any revealing pronouns. The ruse apparently worked. When I asked my class of ninth-graders to write a paragraph describing the kind of person they imagined the author to be, not one student pictured S. E. Hinton as a girl. All thought of her as a socially underprivileged boy, very much like Ponyboy Curtis. Now, of course, neither Hinton nor her publisher makes any particular effort to hide the truth.

I would recommend all four of Hinton's novels for use with high school students, and possibly with older junior high students as well. S. E. Hinton is masterful in creating memorable, fully realized characters. These characters experience intense conflicts, both external and internal, the resolution of which provides the basis for powerful thematic statements. In each of her novels, Hinton uses realistic dialogue and the authentic voice of a teenage narrator. She is a talented writer who makes a strong effort to understand young people. In fact, her degree from the University of Tulsa was in education.

Tex, published in 1979, is S. E. Hinton's most recent novel. The major conflict in the story is in the relationship between two brothers, Tex and Mason McCormick. The narrator Tex, who is nearly fifteen years old, is easygoing, thoughtless, and direct. He loves everybody and everything, and especially his horse Negrito. Seventeen-year-old Mason, a high school basketball star, is more highstrung and critical. The boys live alone in a rundown house because their mother is dead and their father is off following the rodeos. The trouble begins when Pop fails to return in the fall and Mason is forced to sell Negrito to raise money to pay their bills. As Mason increasingly assumes the role of parent, Tex increasingly resents his tyranny. If the McCormick brothers did not live in the country, they could be considered "greasers." Their neighbors, the Collins family, represent the privileged class. Johnny Collins, who has his own motorcycle, is Tex's best friend. Johnny's outspoken younger sister Jamie becomes Tex's girlfriend, although social status and Jamie's "six-four" father threaten to keep them apart.

My ninth-graders enjoyed reading *Tex* last fall. But even then, they were anxiously looking forward to the release of the Walt Disney Productions film version, which stars the current teen idol Matt Dillon. The filming was done in S. E. Hinton's native Oklahoma, and the author even allowed Dillon to use her own horse in the movie.

Teenagers who read one S. E. Hinton book usually want to read another. Interest in *The Outsiders* should be rekindled by the re-

lease of a movie version of that novel. The director is Francis Ford Coppola, and the filming was done in Tulsa.

In *The Outsiders*, as in *Tex*, conflict exists in the relationship among brothers. The three Curtis boys live alone as the result of the death of their parents in an auto accident. However, in this novel, the conflict between the Socs and the greasers assumes precedence over the more domestic strife. Although the greasers remain "the outsiders," some communication, mainly through the efforts of the Soc girl Cherry Valance, is established between the two warring groups of teenagers. Despite the fact that life may be harder for the greasers on the East Side than it is for the Socs on the West Side, Ponyboy comes to realize that the Socs too have their problems and that "things are rough all over." He and Cherry can't really be friends, but they can watch the same sunset. Brotherhood, and not just the conflict between brothers, is the central theme of *The Outsiders*. Even though this novel was published in 1967, students seem to have little difficulty in relating to the characters. Today's teenagers simply replace "greasers" and "Socs" with some more familiar dichotomous terms, such as "freaks" and "jocks."

That Was Then, This Is Now, published in 1971, is supposed to take place a year or two after the close of the action in *The Outsiders*. Bryon Douglas, the narrator, is sixteen years old and compares himself to a friendly St. Bernard puppy. His "brother" Mark is small and blonde and resembles a friendly, but potentially dangerous, lion. Mark comes to live with Bryon after his parents shoot each other to death in a family argument. Bryon's father is dead, and his mother is in the hospital. Bryon and Mark had been happy as brothers when they were younger and a part of a greaser gang. But drugs have destroyed the gangs, and ultimately destroy the friendship between the two.

That Was Then, This Is Now has been a little less popular with my classes than either *Tex* or *The Outsiders*. Many students have difficulty in understanding and accepting the still unresolved problems that Bryon faces at the end of the novel. Also, the book is somewhat dated by its references to the draft, to "flower children," and even to fifteen cent Cokes. I would recommend *That Was Then, This Is Now* for small group or independent reading, rather than for an entire class.

S. E. Hinton's third novel, *Rumble Fish*, was published in 1975. Although it is my personal favorite, I had little success in teaching it to a class of lower-track juniors. In this novel, Hinton presents two of her most striking characters: Rusty-James and his brother,

the Motorcycle Boy. In addition to having an unusual name, the Motorcycle Boy is brilliant and handsome, with "wine-colored hair" and "midnight eyes," which remind one of trying to look into a two-way mirror. Fourteen-year-old Rusty-James, the narrator of the story, is, by his own admission, not particularly bright. He admires his older brother and wants to be like him, tough and cool and calm and dangerous. But it is part of the Motorcycle Boy's mystique not to be easily understood, and certainly not by anyone as simple and trusting as his younger brother. Rusty-James, who is a tough but likeable kid, ends by losing everything: his little bleached-blonde girlfriend, his leadership of the local gang, and eventually even his brother.

Stylistically, ***Rumble Fish*** presents many problems for less able readers. The narrator Rusty-James, unlike his brighter counterparts in Hinton's other novels, has difficulty in understanding people and in interpreting the significance of events. The reader is thus more frequently expected to make inferences and draw conclusions. Also, the interpretation of fairly abstract symbolism is essential to understanding the novel. For instance, the rumble fish referred to in the title are Siamese fighting fish, which must be kept one per bowl in the pet shop so that they will not kill each other. The Motorcycle Boy's plan is to carry the fish to the river, but no explanation is ever given of why he wants to do this. And, finally, poorer readers have difficulty in comprehending that the first and the last chapter of the book take place five or six years later than the main action of the story. ***Rumble Fish*** clearly demands more reading maturity and more skill in interpreting literature than any of Hinton's other novels.

Today, whenever a teacher assigns or recommends works of popular fiction, he or she must be prepared to meet the possible attacks of censors. The classroom use of the novels of S. E. Hinton can, I believe, be fairly easily defended. Violence, in the form of gang fighting, does serve an important function, although diminishingly so, in the plots of the first three Hinton novels. However, there are always important characters who question the value and purposes of such fighting. Also, drugs are dealt with rather frequently in Hinton's last three novels. But in no case is the use of drugs made to appear glamorous, and the narrator always condemns their use. On the other hand, romance in all the novels tends to be on a very innocent level, with no explicit sexual descriptions. "Four-letter words," with the exception of a very rare "hell" or "damn," are not found in any of the novels. Characters may use profanity or obscenities, but their exact words are not quoted. S. E. Hinton

does present her characters against a background of crime and injustice and of drugs and violence, but these young people are basically good and are trying hard to work out a sound moral code by which to live.

I am sure that classes will enjoy reading *Tex* and *The Outsiders* and that individual students will also appreciate *That Was Then, This Is Now* and *Rumble Fish*. Less able readers have frequently told me that a Hinton novel was the first book that they have ever finished reading. And I believe teachers will not be offended by either Hinton's literary style or her moral outlook. The world created by S. E. Hinton for popular fiction certainly merits exploration by students and teachers.

Clarifying Values through Popular Teenage Fiction: Strategies for Use with Problem Novels

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The category of adolescent fiction currently most popular with secondary students is unquestionably the problem novel, but questions are continually being raised about the literary value of such books and hence their appropriateness in the English class. I have found these novels serve a vital function when used as the basis for thoughtful discussion and writing focused on the clarification of values.

As we all know, adolescence is a time when students are full of conflicting emotions — fear, self-doubt, compassion and all kinds of anxiety. Since they can comparatively little urging to read such books and to want to discuss them afterwards. I have found, however, that with my students there is often frustration resulting from the difficulty they have verbalizing these strong feelings. In order to facilitate expression and channel their thought, I have developed two strategies focused on a problem of concern to them all — the relationship between the sexes.

These strategies were devised to accompany the reading of three novels about teenage pregnancy, books which still enjoy wide

popularity: *Mr. and Mrs. BoJo Jones* by Ann Head, *My Darling, My Hamburger* by Paul Zindel and *A Girl Like Me* by Jeannette Eyerly. All three deal with the dilemma facing unmarried teens and each offers a viable and realistic alternative. In *My Darling, My Hamburger,* an illegal abortion is the answer. In *A Girl Like Me,* the protagonist, Cass, rejects the young father's half-hearted offer of marriage and has the baby — only to place it up for adoption. In *Mr. and Mrs. BoJo Jones,* the young couple marries, deciding to stay together even after a miscarriage.

While these books may appear "dated" in terms of copyright, the themes evoked and the problems set forth are not. My continued use of these particular titles was justified by a survey I took last summer, finding they were given top rating in five widely scattered communities: St. Louis, Missouri; Grand Prairie, Texas; and three towns in Illinois — Normal, Belleville and Dupo. Fellow teachers in Tempe, Arizona and Salinas, Utah, also reported enthusiastic teenage response in their areas. By no means, however, are the strategies limited to these three novels nor even to this particular problem or genre. The beauty of the values-strategy method is its adaptability.

I turned to this method because I found that too often we teachers unwittingly tend to direct our students' thoughts into "right" or "wrong" grooves, ending up, at best, confusing or chastizing them or, at worst, stifling any possibilities of communication. The strategies, both adapted from *Personalizing Education* by Howe and Howe, encourage students to express their own feelings and thoughts in their own way. The method allows me, as teacher, to remain outside any overt direction of thought.

The first strategy makes use of a list of value questions designed for clarifying the students' ideas. The second, a set of value sheets — one for each novel — requires students to clarify and confirm their own values by considering those depicted in the book. I have tried to provide opportunity for wide response through various ways of using the questions. For instance, students can respond individually by answering from the list whichever questions are of greatest interest or personal relevance. The answer may be a written composition or may be given in class within the context of a discussion. Or individual students can draw from a box a slip of paper upon which is written one of the statements. The issue thus brought up on the "drawing" can then be addressed, either verbally or in writing. Group response can also be structured. Four teams can be chosen to prepare for a forum, with each discussing the issue of a specific problem. Or discussion can be structured into a kind of

round-robin format. I appoint leaders for four discussion centers designated in each corner of the room. Students may then go to the area of their first choice in order to participate in a small group. At timed intervals, the groups shift so that each student can participate in all four areas.

STRATEGY I: CLARIFICATION THROUGH QUESTIONS AND DIRECTED ACTIVITIES

In order to give focus to discussion and writing, I have categorized a series of values questions into four problem areas: sex and pregnancy, marriage, family relationships, and education.

SEX AND PREGNANCY

1. Why do so many young girls become pregnant during the early years of high school? What could or should be done to help decrease this number? Or should anything be done?
2. Is there any difference between love and being in love? Explain.
3. Read any article on love or something you think shows love. Tell about it. Then cut out other articles that don't show love and tell why.
4. Girls only! What is a boyfriend?
5. Boys only! What is a girlfriend? What kind of a girl do you want for a girlfriend? What would you do to keep her happy enough to be your steady girl?
6. What does going steady mean to you? Discuss the pros and cons of going steady. Do you think you would ever want to go steady?
7. Do you believe in sex before marriage? If so, under what circumstances? What are some of the consequences that you might possibly face? What should you do if you, or, in the case of boys, your girl becomes pregnant? Would you consider marriage? Abortion? Giving up for adoption? Why or why not?
8. Write about a date, real or made up: Where? Time you left? Things done? Time you came home? Any problems?
9. You are a girl in high school, age 17, and you are pregnant. Describe your feelings, and the reactions of your friends, parents, relatives, teachers, boyfriend.
10. What does morality mean? Are we experiencing a "new morality"? Is it good or bad?

MARRIAGE

1. What do you believe is the ideal age to get married for men? For women? Why?
2. What are your feelings about divorce? Why do you feel this way?
3. What does marriage mean to you? Are you anxious to get married? Why? Why not?
4. Imagine that you are getting married. Plan the perfect marriage.
5. Write a description of your ideal mate.
6. Write a marriage contract.
7. What is a good marriage?
8. What should people know about each other before they get married?
9. Where would you spend your honeymoon? Plan the trip, including expenses and experiences.
10. How many children do you want? Why did you choose that number? How would you raise the children?
11. How do you think the words "responsibility" and "respect" relate to the word "marriage"?
12. How do you feel about being engaged for a long time before getting married? Do you feel it makes for a strong marriage? Why or why not?
13. Would you like to be married right now? Why or why not?

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

1. Write a theme on your degree of freedom compared to that which your friends have.
2. What do you think is the biggest problem in families today? Who or what causes it? What can be done about it?
3. If you could pick any two people to be your parents (excluding your present parents) who would you pick? Tell why.
4. Discuss what you think might be the average day in the life of a mother or father.
5. What is discipline? (in your own words!) If you were a parent, how would you handle discipline? What might be the result?
6. Answer these questions: What bothers you most about adults? Why? When you become an adult how do you want to be similar to or different from the adults you know?
7. Spend a day with a member of your family and tell about it in a journal. What did you like most about that person's day? What did you like least about it?

8. Do research on possible alternative types of family structure or living units. What alternative do you like best? Describe or depict through drawings what this alternative might be.
9. Describe an ideal relationship with the following people: Mother, Father, Sister, Brother.
10. How would you try to create a perfect relationship? List the steps you would have to follow.
11. Describe your family.
12. Write down ten things you like to do with your family.
13. Write down some advice you'd give your younger brothers or sisters about getting along with parents.
14. Write about what makes you most proud of your family.
15. What do you like best about your brother or sister? How can you let them know this?
16. Do most parents trust their children? What do children do to make parents trust them?

EDUCATION

1. What would you do if you received a three-day suspension from school?
2. Design an ideal high school either in words or in drawings.
3. What would you do if you dropped out of school?
4. If you didn't go to school what would you do? Write about it.
5. Do you believe school causes emotional problems in teenagers? Why or why not?
6. If you had the opportunity to quit school, would you? Why or why not? What would be the disadvantage of leaving school? The advantage?
7. What are you going to do when you get out of school? Do you think your job will have any effect on anyone else? For example: you are a mortician. Without you, what would everyone do with all the dead bodies? You can see this job is certainly needed by everyone. Write a theme on the importance of YOUR job.

STRATEGY II: VALUES SHEETS

A *values sheet* is simply a self-contained lesson, usually centering around a single issue, problem, or dilemma that arises because of a conflict in a values-area. The four values-sheets that follow prescribe one issue in each of the novels, with the fourth sheet presenting some current facts and statistics concerning teen-pregnancy.

Values Sheet One: *My Darling, My Hamburger*

Think about what happens in the novel. Think about Maggie and Dennis, Sean and Liz. Think about Liz's ultimate pregnancy, abortion, and dropping out of school. Go back over all that happens in the novel, and consider the following:

1. What problems are brought out in *My Darling, My Hamburger?* Which of the problems is of greatest concern to you?
2. Think of all the different possible ways that there were to solve or cope with this problem. List them.
3. Which of these alternatives do you think are best solutions to the problem? Is that the way the problem was handled in the novel? Do you agree with the final solution?
4. Has this problem been close to you in the past? Has it been a situation close to anyone you knew? What decision was reached?
5. What were the consequences of the decision?

Values Sheet Two: *A Girl Like Me*

In *My Darling, My Hamburger,* a pregnancy is terminated by an abortion, one solution to the situation. In *A Girl Like Me,* Cass Carter decides to have the baby but later places it for adoption. Considering that decision as a solution to her problem, think about the following:

1. How do you feel about the situation faced by Cass? How do you feel about the choice made by her?
2. What other ways could Cass have acted to solve her problem?
3. What would you have done?
4. Have you, or someone close to you, faced a similar situation?
5. What did you, or they, do?
6. What were the consequences of the action taken?
7. Would you recommend they have acted differently, or would you act differently if faced with the same situation now?

Values Sheet Three: *Mr. and Mrs. Bo Jo Jones*

The third of our novels presents another unplanned pregnancy. In *My Darling, My Hamburger,* Liz has an abortion. In *A Girl Like Me,* Cass decides to give birth to the baby but places it for adoption. In *Mr. and Mrs. Bo Jo Jones,* however, July marries the father of the baby and after a miscarriage, she and Bo Jo decide to continue together, trying to make good their marriage. Think about this third decision and discuss the following:

1. How do you feel about what took place? Do you think such things happen often? Why?
2. What were the differing attitudes the families had toward the problem?
3. What is your attitude?
4. What would you have done in this situation?
5. What might happen if you stick to that decision?

Values Sheet Four: *Facts about teen pregnancy*

The following information is based upon statistics furnished by the National Alliance for Optional Parenthood, 2010 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington, D.C., and is used with their permission.

— Half of all U.S. teen-agers are sexually active.
— More than 1 million girls under 20 get pregnant each year. Some are only in the fifth grade.
— Six out of 10 pregnant girls carry their babies to delivery; that adds up to 600,000 babies born annually to girls under 20. The rest have abortions or miscarriages.
— The teen-agers who will become parents in the next 24 hours would fill an average high school.
— One out of five deliveries in the U.S. today is to a teen-ager.
— Most teen-agers say they are not ready for parenthood. Yet only one out of five teens who does not want to become pregnant uses any method of birth control.
— Pregnancy is the most common reason for girls dropping out of school. They then become less likely than their peers to get jobs and more likely to become dependent on welfare.
— If pregnant teen-agers marry the fathers of their children, they run a 25-percent risk of ending up in the divorce courts.
— Teen-age mothers and their babies have more medical problems than the average.

Consider:

1. Do any of these facts surprise you? Startle you? Shock you? Which one(s)?
2. What do you think can be done to curb unwanted pregnancies?
3. What is your reaction to these facts? (Fear, anger, disgust?) Why do you think you feel this way?
4. Have you always felt this way? If not, when did your thinking change?
5. Do you believe in sex education being taught in the schools? If so, at what level do you think it should be taught? Who should teach it? Should boys and girls be taught in the same classroom?

6. In *My Darling, My Hamburger*, Sean tells Liz to "take the pill." If teens do participate actively in sex, whose responsibility is prevention . . . the boy's or the girl's? Why do you feel that way?

Traditional Literature — Make It Popular! The Teacher's Responsibility in the Language Arts Program

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Listening to three diverse country western radio stations gives the listener a clue as to which records will be on the "Country Western Top 10." Those songs will be those you hear over and over again. This leads to the proverbial chicken or egg syndrome. Is a record played over and over again thereby making the top 10 because listeners really like it, or is it in the top 10 because it has been played over and over again? The assumption underlying this article is that in fact it is in the top 10 and listeners like it because it is *familiar* and they *have heard* it over and over again. The way to make any given piece of literature popular, therefore, is to expose readers to it over and over again.

In working with pre-service elementary teachers I have been appalled to discover that the students in the nineteen to twenty-one year-old age range are unable to recall nursery rhymes, fairy tales, fables, folk tales, or tall tales. This generation was raised on "Sesame Street" and the "Electric Company," but apparently not on "Hey diddle diddle . . ." or dear "Humpty Dumpty." These are teachers who will be responsible for facilitating children's language development and stimulating children to read. Nursery rhymes, fairy tales, fables, folk tales, and tall tales are rich in language.

Rhythm, inflection, and fluidity occur very naturally as one recites a nursery rhyme. A feel for the sounds of language and rhyme is also unavoidable. The beginning seeds of understanding of plot and characterization may be planted in the fertile ground of nursery rhymes. Who can deny that Little Boy Blue is a somewhat irresponsible young man or that the spider was vital to the plot of "Little Miss Muffet"?

The fairy tales that Walt Disney failed to popularize are dying a quick death if my unscientific sampling of pre-service teachers is any indication. Hänsel and Gretel, Rapunzel, or Rose Red each have an interesting story to tell. These are stories rich in language, rhythm, and the repetition young children love. How can a teacher open these doors if he or she has never turned the handle?

Aesop's fables, folk tales and the tall tales are suffering similar fates. Of twenty pre-service teachers recently sampled, not one could identify "Pecos Bill" or the "Blue Ox." Interpretive reading skills flourish as one seeks out the exaggerations of tall tales.

Teachers could return nursery rhymes, fairy tales, fables, folk tales, and tall tales to the land of the known and loved. The first step would be to spend a few hours or days rereading, or reading for the first time, from these works. After this self-immersion in the forms of traditional literature the teacher is then ready to raise these forms back into the realms of known and popular literature.

I have never met a five-year-old who after having the fun of acting out "Jack Be Nimble" or "Little Jack Horner" didn't ask to do so over and over again. Second graders excitedly preparing costumes for presentation of their version of Rumpelstiltskin seem unaware of the age of the original manuscript. The tall tales of "Paul Bunyon" appeal to the fourth graders of today just as they did twenty or thirty years ago. The folk tales of Russia, China, or Japan give insight to the cultures they sprang from better than any twenty pages of a social studies text.

The popularity of the traditional forms of children's literature is in the hands of the classroom teacher. If a record gains popularity by replaying so can nursery rhymes, fairy tales, fables, folk tales and tall tales. Learning centers, bulletin boards, and learning games all lend themselves to promoting this popularity.

Nursery rhymes rewritten with synonyms can turn into a fun matching game and a way to learn about words with similar meanings. "Little Boy Blue" became "Small Boy Azure" when one world-wise fifth grader tried his hand at rewriting nursery rhymes. One gains a sense of compassion for the troll in the "Three Billy Goats Gruff" when reading a third grader's version as told from the troll's point of view. Fairy tales retold from one of the other character's point of view requires the aspiring author to understand the subtleties of the original version. Having read a first grader's tall tale involving a heroic giraffe leads the reader to believe the writer understood the sense of what makes a tale tall and also the humor of double meanings! Sixth graders, after reading three versions of "Little Red Riding Hood," better understood the concept of author's license.

Third graders struggling with first grade basal readers found an assignment to produce a radio program featuring a diverse folk tale each week an incentive to complete other assignments. Fifth grade slow readers enjoyed the task of underlining the Dolch words in nursery rhymes when they shared their illustrated versions with kindergarteners.

The Illinois State Superintendent of Schools has recently called for a return to the teaching of morals. How better can this be done than through the reading of fables? After all, didn't we learn from the hare and the tortoise that "plodding wins the race"? The "Miser and His Gold" moral that "wealth unused might as well not exist" fits the wealth of literature represented by traditional literature.

Maybe we, as teachers, can learn from these old fables. It is the consistency of the diet of literature we feed children that determines the end product and not the intensity at one point in their education. I challenge each of you to return briefly each year to the wealth of traditional literature, for it deserves its place in the realm of the popular. Its rhythm, rhyme, and language will thrive through repetition. A creative teacher is all it takes to promote this material to the status of popularity. This wealth of literature will not exist for generations of children if we as teachers fail to explore its fertility yearly.

Lively Literature Projects for Children: Encouraging Student Involvement through Popular Books

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Group projects are fun. And group projects that spring from an elementary literature program are educational fun. How can you provide this kind of enjoyment for your students? I do it by capitalizing on the appeal of books that I've found sure-fire — books by such popular authors as E. B. White or Laura Ingalls Wilder.

First, group students with similar interests and reading abilities together. Tell them they are going to work together to prepare a literature project. During the initial meeting, present them with

the book you especially selected for them and give a short book talk in order to "sell" the book. Ask the students to be reading during spare class time. When they have finished, have them meet for the purpose of discussion and decision making for the completion of a sharing project such as the ones described here.

The groups obviously must operate on a flexible time schedule. After three or more groups in my class have completed their project, I invite guests for a formal sharing program; they may be parents, faculty members or other students.

My involvement in each project varies from book to book, depending upon need. For instance, I often have to make suggestions or to provide information. The students call on me throughout the activity to act as mediator as well as resource person, but I try to encourage as much independent thinking as I can.

The following are examples of the popular books which have proved most successful in my classroom.

Charlotte's Web by E. B. White

This book, undoubtedly one of the most popular books with children, lends itself to a project based on character analysis. After I review the book with the group, I ask each child to choose two of the main characters to analyze and describe. This exercise often takes the form of having the children select adjectives which best describe the personality of each character. Then, with the aid of an overhead projector, the group members make bulletin-board sized models of their characters with the appropriate adjectives boldly written across them. The bulletin board is titled: "What are the characters of *Charlotte's Web* like?" At the program presentation the book is summarized for the audience and the choice of adjectives explained. The children expand on the sentence form I provide: "We used the adjective _____ to describe (Templeton, for instance) because he _____."

From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler by Elaine Konigsburg

For this popular Newbery Award winner, my students choose six major events which can be used to summarize the story and draw these scenes with grease pencils onto transparencies. When all group members approve of the drawings, the children color the scenes with permanent markers. They then tape together the transparencies to form a giant filmstrip that can be projected on the screen from an overhead projector. All group members then participate in writing a script using the six events as focal points. They learn to write good lead-ins and lead-outs in order to form

a smooth narrative. After enough rehearsals to obtain an effective dramatic reading of the script, they record the entire "production" onto a cassette.

This activity can be used successfully with many books. My students have particularly enjoyed this project in connection with *The Black Pearl, Caddie Woodlawn, Blue Willow, Henry Reed, Inc.* and *A Wrinkle in Time.*

My Side of the Mountain by Jean George

Children who like to build things find it fun to create a forest home for this book. Using a large paper-covered piece of cardboard as a base, the students paint on a stream and glue on other landmarks. The tree home is made of flour-salt paste and fur is used for the door. The top is left open so viewers can see the hammock, table and other furniture. Since the book tells of survival in the wilderness, much of the story revolves around food. One of my groups decided it would be appropriate to serve refreshments for their program and so they learned how to make blueberry jam for the occasion! The program itself was a sharing of a summary of the book, with the most important events stressed.

Little House in the Big Woods by Laura Ingalls Wilder

Students working with this book like to compare food preparation of today with that required of the settlers. This involves their using encyclopedias and other reference materials to learn more about types of food, butchering techniques and other processes. For an oral presentation at the program, one group prepared a giant shadow box of the Ingalls' attic — filled with meats curing, and fruits and vegetables drying. They also prepared homemade bread for their guests.

Blue Willow by Doris Gates

Since the blue willow plate is so important to the story in this book, my children made a facsimile of paper machier, using chalk and white paint for the willow design. Their work is then displayed for their audience as the children explain how the plate demonstrates the central theme.

The Island of the Blue Dolphins by Scott O'Dell

For this popular Newbery Award winner, my students prepare a huge map of the island to be the focal point of a bulletin board display. They point to areas of the map which are the scene of important events in Karana's life as they recount the story's highlights.

Stuart Little by E. B. White

The project for this book is to translate the action onto a large piece of cardboard which has a winding path drawn across its face. The children use play dough to depict major scenes from the book at each curve of the track. The program is called "Follow the Adventures of Stuart Little."

Sideways Stories from Wayside School by Louis Sachar

This collection of hilarious stories lends itself well to a creative writing project since its classroom tales inspire children to write their own. My class produced its own book entitled "Strange But True Stories from Greene Elementary." Each student had actually written a chapter by exaggerating habits and personality traits for humorous effect.

These projects are the most successful I have used, but the possibilities are almost without limit. The key is to give the children books they will really enjoy. If their reading is pleasurable, they'll come up with ideas themselves for programs that will allow them to "show off" in front of an audience. And the fun they have can be truly educational, for the projects involve character analysis, sequencing, summarizing and creative writing as well as practice in oral communication.

Too often classroom exposure to fine books consists only of oral reading by the teacher, usually after lunch. Some teachers do attempt to incorporate language arts studies by assigning one book for the entire class to read, but unfortunately this technique does not take into account differing abilities and interests. Too often follow-up activities are centered on the teacher's asking questions about the text.

I have described techniques which have worked for me. They can easily be a part of any classroom. There are so many delightful books that children respond to. Their involvement with such books and with each other can bring them both enjoyment *and* learning.

Opinions from Our Readers

Coping with Censorship

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The penalty for censoring what your children may be taught is children who are not brighter than you.

— Frank A. Clark, Register and Tribune Syndicate

The statement above quoted from *Reader's Digest*, October, 1981, unfortunately is not a universally held view by a great many people today. At the present time there are over 100 local, state and national organizations involved in the arena of censorship of what students can read or be taught. As far back as 1925, the prophetic voice of Clarence Darrow, arguing the right to teach evolution at the Scopes trial, said: "If today you can take a thing like evolution and make it a crime to teach it in the public school . . . at the next session you may ban books and newspapers. . . . Ignorance and fanaticism are ever busy and need feeding." Today we see the results of Darrow's prediction in the current debates over creationism/evolution and increased censorship of books in English classes.

A recent study found that one in every five school districts is under pressure to purge books that someone finds offensive. Titles include that old perennial favorite of censors, *Huckleberry Finn*, which was banned from the Concord, Massachusetts, Public Library as early as 1885. Much of the impetus behind censorship comes from fear — fear that the students will learn some obscene words; fear that they will be exposed to explicit sexual scenes, thereby luring them into experimentation with sex; fear that the students will not learn right from wrong because some characters in books behaved in an unseemly fashion — and on and on the fears escalate.

Today parents have joined organizations like Moral Majority, the Eagle Forum and the Christian Broadcasting Network for leadership in the fight to turn our "free" public schools into a species of private schools that reflect the prevailing views of the leaders of these organizations.

With this article, the ILLINOIS ENGLISH BULLETIN *is beginning a regular section devoted to reader opinion. Essays may be on any issue of concern to teachers of English.* — Editor.

Few people would argue against the fact that parents have a legitimate right, even a duty, to be concerned about what their children are reading. In order to cope with complaints about books when they occur, it is essential that school districts have prior guidelines established by the school board, administrators, teachers and parents for handling such decisions as have to be made. It makes more good will and good sense to allow parents to know that their child can have access to an alternate book selection rather than be compelled to take a failing grade for not reading an assigned book, objectionable in the eyes of the complaining parents. Written forms for presenting complaints about books are available from the National Committee for Teachers of English or a school district could devise its own.

English teachers are fully aware of prominent authors whose books are coming under the ban of censorship, and they range from relatively new authors like Judy Blume to older established authors, even Shakespeare. Much of the criticism is that reading such books is atheistic and promotes secular humanism, a term that defies description. Terry Todd has stated: "Secular humanism is the underlying philosophy of all schools. Those of us who understand know how it is infiltrated, know how it is inculcated in the children." And this is a statement from the national chairman of a group disingenuously named Stop Textbook Censorship!

Even political satirist Art Buchwald has entered the fray. His concern in a recent column was: "Some of them could be your best friends without you knowing they are humanists. They could come into your house, play with your children, eat your food and even watch football on television, and you'd never know that they have read *Catcher in the Rye, Brave New World* and *Huckleberry Finn*. . . . If we're going to go back to the old moral values that made this country great, we're going to have to do it with search-and-destroy methods. First, we must burn the books — and if that isn't enough, then we must burn the people."

In an attempt to discover the extent of censorship in Illinois schools, the author designed an opinionaire which was sent to a randomly selected sample of 200 high school principals in Illinois. Ninety-six (45%) subjects completed the opinionaire. Among the questions were those dealing with the amount of censorship being felt in their schools in the content of English textbooks. Not surprisingly, since teachers of English have borne the brunt of censorship attacks nation-wide, the results of this survey showed that English textbooks in Illinois received more censorship than those in other disciplines. A total of fourteen categories of possible cen-

sorship of English textbooks was presented to the principals, and the results are shown here.

Table 1
CENSORSHIP OF ENGLISH TEXTBOOKS

Category	*Very Frequently*	*Frequently*	*Occasionally*	*Never*
		(percent)		
Pornography	13.0	13.8	13.0	37.2
Obscenity	6.3	17.0	39.0	37.0
Racism	4.2	7.4	29.4	52.0
Illustrations	2.1	8.4	34.0	47.3
Violence	4.2	3.2	42.1	49.4
Sexist	2.1	4.2	40.0	52.0
Occult	0	4.2	39.0	47.4
Study of black authors	0	4.2	15.0	77.0
No black authors included	1.1	2.1	10.0	72.3
Reputation of author	0	2.1	27.4	71.0
Book leads to rejection of parent/ God/country	0	5.3	28.0	60.0
Harsh realities of life	1.1	4.2	36.0	58.0
Would encourage inappropriate behavior	4.2	3.2	31.0	57.0
Would lower moral values	4.2	3.2	35.0	54.0

Obscenity was censored to some degree in 62% of the schools. It is interesting to note that a high percentage of the categories were never censored in Illinois schools to date. This was consistent with the findings of this research study that never-censored items responses ranged from 23% from some items to 81% for others.

Table 2
ORIGIN OF CENSORSHIP

Category	*Never*	*Occasionally*	*Frequently*	*Very Frequently*
		(percent)		
Individual parent	23.4	59.0	13.0	1.1
Religious group	41.1	43.2	7.4	2.1
Local group	53.2	35.1	5.3	0
Educational Research Analysts	81.0	10.0	2.1	0
Eagle Forum	72.3	13.0	2.1	0
NOW	78.0	10.0	2.1	0
John Birch Society	69.1	17.0	1.1	1.1

These results reveal that community forces were more involved in censorship than outside groups, who had never been active in 69% to 81% of the schools.

Other interesting data from the survey disclosed that 40% of the principals attested that censorship attempts never had been successful, 49% that it had been successful occasionally and 7% said attempts frequently were successful. It also was established that 75% of the schools used committees of teachers to select textbooks.

The implications of this study reveal that at the present time, while censorship is being exerted in Illinois schools, it does not appear to be on a grand scale or to be orchestrated by outside groups. This in no way should lead teachers of English to infer that "it can't happen here," but that they should be prepared before the blow falls.